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ART AND CITIZENSHIP

BY IAN B. STOUGHTON HOLBORN

PART III—THE CITY: THE OUTER EXPRESSION OF AN INNER SELF

IN the two previous sections it has been shown that the principles of art and citizenship are one. The law of beauty and design is the law of being, and citizenship is the art of living. Are we then to teach men how consciously to make a beautiful city? or are we to make them nobler in themselves, so that the beautiful city will unconsciously be the outcome of their natural expression? Or, thirdly, will our end be reached if we simply make the city an example of beauty to inspire men, till as lovers of the beautiful, they make beautiful things in their turn?

Let us then examine somewhat further than hitherto the conditions that bear on these three alternatives. We have seen that a given trait in the character of a people is likely to express itself in some outward and visible object, as Roman savagery expresses itself in amphitheatres, or their love of bathing, in baths. But there is something more subtle than this in the balances and relations that make the design of life, which also is outwardly expressed. A simple example is afforded by one of those English old-world villages that have so well deserved a reputation for beauty.

Why is it beautiful? Although there are other causes, the main one is the unconscious expression of its own inner character. It is no conscious product of trained artists!

It may not have all that is implied in Aristotle's conception of the common life with a noble end or design. It may fail to express the complete triumph of the higher over the lower; it may not show a love of beauty that permeates all things; but perhaps what it actually achieves will surprise us. The village undoubtedly in many ways does express a common life, a sense of community not to be paralleled by the great modern city. It does show an element of nobility and spirituality which finds expression in a degree that the materialism and sensationalism of the city forbid. There is also about it a sense of end and design; for it is the shell of a consciously coherent and organized community and to this also the fevered complexity of the city fails to attain. Nor is some feeling for beauty in the little things of life by any means absent. It is true that at a first glance the village does not reveal any great degree of regularity; indeed we might be tempted to think that it showed absence of design. But looking deeper, we find that, although it has not the conscious design that so often marks a great medieval city, yet there is actually one that is very real, although in the main unconscious; and even this to some ex-

tent has become hardened into a more or less conscious tradition.

Are not these things so? Is there not displayed an organic or artistic whole? Here is the church expressing the centre of the religious life of the community. On the other hand here is the old manor hall, the centre of the secular life, much as we find the heart and the brain as centres of the bodily life. These things have an organic design because they express the inner invisible organization. They are the dominators in that design, giving to it a unity and concentration of meaning. It is largely by the common relation to these centres in the composition that the whole becomes a harmony.

The community or common life is still further marked by the village green or common, or again—the village pond; while in the very heart of the village the churchyard in no uncertain way proclaims the common lot.

But on the other hand it is no mere collection, no mere heap. Unity and variety are not incompatible. These dominant unifying features are themselves highly individualized and as we look further we may see, perhaps, the village mill distinct and individualized and yet more in harmony with the rest of the village than is the case with the modern factory. Nearby is the miller's house, or we may notice the smithy or the doctor's house, distinguished by its modest size and its unusual amount of stabling. Here is the vicarage, there is the schoolhouse and the house of the schoolmaster adjoining, and so we may continue. Each thing has its own meaning and it is the distinctive character about them all that is their charm. Even the cottages of those whose individuality in the community is least marked have a "personality" that our codes of education and our factory systems of industry can never produce. Hence, by a greater unity and a greater individuality, a greater beauty is inevitably attained. Moreover the village as a whole has a greater meaning, individuality and character of its own than belongs to the majority of our newer cities.

The village life is, as we know, much more obviously interdependent than the life of the great city; the place of each member is much more definite and individualized but at the same time more

clearly related to the organism. A village is not the place where one does not know the name of the man next door and there is a sense of common responsibility that makes the casual unrelated laborer or unemployed less in evidence.



THE SPIRITUAL DOMINATES THE OLD VILLAGE

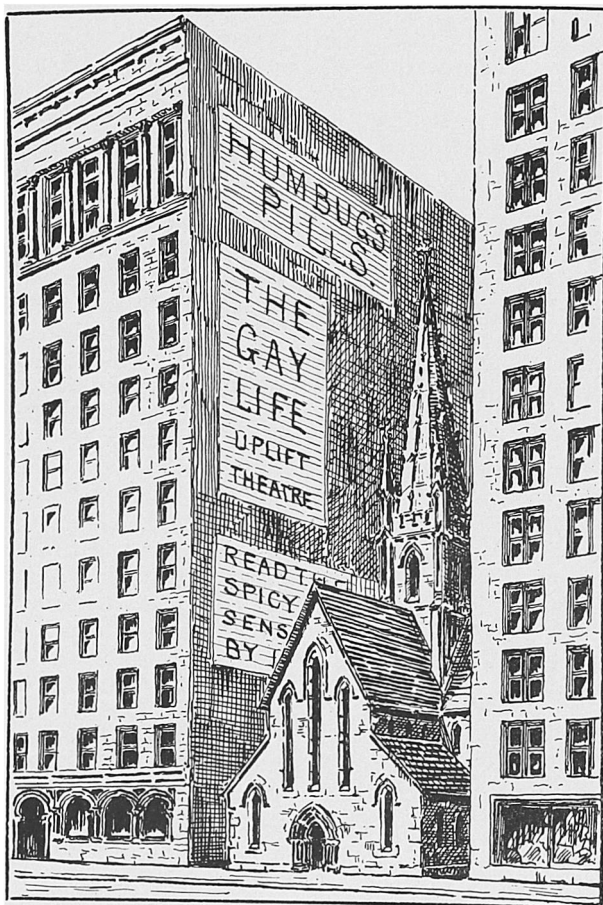
The fact is that to a considerable extent this village still expresses an older and more ordered form of society, that of the feudal system. As an expression of the civilized spirit it may not rank so high as that of the Greek polity; there is no clear intellectual centre and, if a modern library of fiction with a few other books has been added, it rarely fits into the scheme. But at least the feudal system was a system, an order, a thing beautiful in its degree. As to the higher against the lower—the dominance of the church is some expression of this; but the more spiritual side is also shown in a certain reverence for the past and the intangibilities of life, which for the banal vulgar of the modern-sense, sodden materialist is almost a sealed book. The worship of the present, blind to the past and with no definite vision of the future, is the *ne plus ultra* of ignorance. "Whatever makes the past the distant or the future predominate over the present advances us in the dignity of thinking beings." A certain sense for the past is shown in every change that becomes necessary in the village and to this also, besides its immense unifying value, is undoubtedly due much of its spiritual charm and its feeling for form rather than mere matter. Last, although it may not be carried out very deeply, the feeling for beauty belongs to the people rather than to a specialist class. The village does not contain fine paintings or masterpieces of sculpture, but every thatched roof has its charm, every garden allures us with its fragrance and color, and if there is nothing of surpassing greatness, at least there is nothing ugly. I have often met a more genuine feeling for beauty in the cottage than in the city houses of a wealthier class.

What then of our modern cities? If ever there was an age when the city needed to be beautiful it is now. We live where our view is bounded by buildings, and many of our children have never seen the open country at all. If then we are shut off from the beauty of nature, how is our soul's hunger to be fed? This is a problem that does not vex our modern wiseacres, and the terrible consequence is only too apparent. Look at the modern city—huge, unwieldy, chaotic, characterlessly sprawling over the land! What has become of the church that played so important a part in the beauty of the village or the medieval city? Here it is—hemmed in by huge buildings that entirely overwhelm it. It is the factory or the hotel or the great office-building that is now dominating feature. But there

is no effect of unification since all these great buildings jostle each other in an internecine competition. The hotel, as we see it for example crowning San Francisco, is expressive of our modern civilization—restless, aimless, unsettled; busy, feverish, materialist. It is utterly lacking in the spirit of individuality where the ever-moving, covetous, shapeless crowd buzzes and sucks like flies on a rotting corpse. The modern hotel is a fine commentary on the modern appreciation of spiritual peace and the sacredness of personality!

This absolute lack of personality and individuality extends to everything. The very size of the modern city is against it. Suppose we imagine a picture painted on the wall, and round onto the next wall, and then down the stairs and finally out into the street. How is it to be

regarded as a thing of beauty, a rounded whole? How are the values of the different individualities to be related? Can we get the real effect of a piece of music, if it is so long that we can hear but half to-day and must leave the rest till next week? We cannot grasp it as a whole; we cannot get the *tout ensemble* upon which its beauty so largely depends. It is not the details in themselves, as we have seen, that make the picture or the building, but the relationship between them. Aristotle long ago pointed out that the true city cannot be more than a certain size. The size is limited by the size of a man — physically, mentally, spiritually. There is for instance a limit to the number of people that it is possible to know. When a city gets beyond a certain size, the family feeling, if it may so be termed, gets thin and the whole *esprit de corps* tends to suffer. Here is a



THE MODERN ESTIMATE OF THE SPIRITUAL

principle of which the modern world has lost sight. One of the reasons for the comparative failure of the "skyscraper" is surely that man is only about six feet high! Therefore the doors and furniture must be such as he can use and these in turn determine the proportions and heights of the rooms and so on. To avoid characterless individuality in a wall containing several hundred windows of the same size and shape is excessively difficult. Indeed it is surprising how wonderfully successful some architects have been, generally by the method of dividing the vast front into plinth wall and entablature, if we may so phrase it. But notice; it has been at the cost of total suppression of the individuality of the windows and offices, particularly in the middle space. In other words, by denying the true function of the building altogether.

Although all beauty is a matter of relations and proportions and is relative, the fact that the height of mankind is fixed and not variable makes certain things definitely impossible. Where we want to express the infinity of space and the littleness of man, we require one kind of proportion; where we want to express his daily life and common occupations we require another. We cannot entirely play fast and loose with these things.

The same curious lack of the sense of balance and beauty may be seen in the size of the modern school. A school of three hundred may be a conscious community, even although the total school-life is but a few years; but a school of twelve hundred runs great risk of producing an uncultivated mob. Of course a satisfactory system of individual *kosmoi* within the larger *kosmos* might solve the problem of all these things, as we have already seen in the case of Oxford University; but that is not attempted, because the whole artistic sense is lacking.

If we look at the districts of our overgrown modern cities, do we find a *kosmos* within the *kosmos*, an arrangement, an ordered world or whole within a wider whole? There is nothing *cosmic* about them—huge tracts of ground inhabited by only one class of people—an entirely impossible world or community—acres and acres of soul-destroying suburbs inhabited only by clerks in their smug little villas. They are born amongst clerks, they live amongst clerks and they die amongst clerks: they think that the whole world consists of clerks, but it could not and does not.

Or look at the sad lack of individuality in our streets and houses as compared with the old village or medieval city! There is no vicarage here; the parson lives at number five thousand two hundred and twenty-seven, and the miller at number seven thousand six hundred and forty-five. The school-master does not live at all; since education is not now thought to be of much esteem, and as for the lady teacher who takes his place, she merely shares a number with several others in a boarding-house, to mark the appreciation that the state has for such nonentities as are merely responsible for the development of the minds and souls of its citizens instead of such sacred tasks as packing pork! Personality! The triumph of the higher over the lower!

In England it is the houses that are the principal offenders; in America it is the street. Indeed the ingenuity that combines the entire lack of harmony in the houses of a residential suburb in America with an entire lack of individuality in its streets is, in its own way, one of the most extraordinary triumphs of history!

But America cannot surpass England at her worst; and as an extreme instance a personal experience may be permitted. The author knew some people who went to live in the South of London—why any one should go to live in the South of London he does not attempt to explain—the fact remains that they did. He went to pay them a visit and of course they met him at the station. He arrived at the house and, let us say, it was number fifty on the right-hand side of the street. As he mounted the steps he had ample opportunity to study the ugly stereotyped terra-cotta ornaments

that “adorned” the house. He went in; and since the tale is not concerned with his visit, that may be omitted; but some months later, as he now knew the way, he paid them a surprise visit. He soon recognized the street and the house—number fifty on the right-hand side. He rang the bell and waited, shuddering at the same terra-cotta ornaments that he had observed on the previous occasion. When the door was opened he noticed to his surprise that there was a new parlor-maid and to his further astonishment saw that all the furniture was new, even to the carpet. In short, it was not the same house, it was not the same street! But as all the houses were exactly alike, and the streets were exactly alike, the consequence followed. When he told his friends of the experience, they only said “That’s nothing; why we’ve tried to open the door of a house in the next street with our latch-key and you have no idea how angry they were when they stopped us trying to get in!”

Of course such instances are exceptional, but they show the way we are tending. Our cities unconsciously express the fact that modern civilization has no clearness of aim and that the fundamental sense of design in life is lacking.

Once more; what of the quality of nobility, of aspiration, of the endeavor to rise above the material and sensational to the higher rather than merely seek the lower and “have a good time”? Quite apart from any religious aspect of the question, one might almost say that every stone in a medieval city is full of suggestiveness, of romance, of spirituality, of aspiration, and a prodigality of loving labor regardless of material ends. A single set of iron hinges from the thirteenth century or an iron lock from the fifteenth reveals more affectionate toil than would furnish entire many a modern room. These things are unintelligible to us. The worship of materialism is rampant and is shown in the preponderance of factories and business houses in our cities. “Jerry-building” and scamped work reveal our dishonesty and desire for money rather than good work, in marked contrast with the great craftsmen of Greece or the Middle Ages. There was bad work even then, but in the main the distinction holds—our workers are wage-earners, not craftsmen. Our education may be better than that of the Middle Ages, whatever may be said of Greece, but it lacks loftiness of aim. We want a “bread-and-butter” education—not to make men who are higher in the scale of being. All this is expressed in the “shell.” We cannot escape from this inevitable law; and posterity will read the shallow conceit of our education, its ephemeral superficiality, its purely vocational or “bread-and-butter” character, that seeks self-advancement rather than self-development, that finds nobility irksome and comfort alluring written all over our ostentatious and meretricious buildings and household objects, our luxurious and ornate hotels, our vast establishments for the sale of dress and other ephemeral vanities, our “movie-palaces,” and our cast-iron radiators; and, if any of our literature should survive, in the scrappiness, sensationalism and utter triviality of the bulk of our magazines.

Nowhere is our sensationalism and lack of restraint more evident than in our advertisements, which may well take away the breath of future archeologists who come to interpret our civilization.

They are all on a par with the hideous rattle and roar and vulgar notes of the modern city. "Why need the horn of a motor-car make such a discordantly repulsive sound?" I once asked, "might it not be loud and yet be musical?" "O, people would not move for anything less" was the reply. What a curious commentary on the modern mind and type of man—that nothing will move him unless it is hideous and excruciating! and meanwhile he cares not in the least for the nerves and feelings of other people. The Medieval was summoned by means of a bell, the Modern uses a hooter. It is on a par with modern conversation, where, when all shout, only a yell can be heard.

In short, our failure is not a failure in ability but in desire. It is not that we cannot but that we will not. And our aspiration as well as our achievement is written in our cities, awaiting the comments of posterity.

Our first problem, then, results in showing the inevitableness of unconscious self-revelation and incidentally has brought out the fundamental failure in spiritual desire that marks our day. The second problem at this stage need not detain us long. If so much unconscious self-revelation is inevitable, can we at all build up consciously a beautiful city apart from our nature?

Undoubtedly this is very largely possible. We can learn codes of rules and carry out mechanically as a duty what at heart we do not feel. We may be made to do something better than we should do if left to ourselves. We may even make a beautiful thing because we desire a something that is beyond ourselves, one that is more than the mere expression of ourselves could give. It is quite possible largely to suppress the unconscious expression, if we are continually on our guard; and the result will be a reaction upon ourselves and a reshaping of the inner in conformity with the conscious outer expression. This is the law of habit, and since the decay of Greek civilization the formation of a habit has been the main and sometimes the only method of the teacher. The difficulty is that this involves the necessity that the pupil should first have an inner conviction of the duty, or submit himself to the teacher. But the adult in a democratic state will not so submit himself until he has the inner wish to learn the lesson.

In any case then, we are thrown back upon the same conclusion to which our first problem was leading us. Unless we have some external authority, which does not exist in a democratic state, there is no means open to us except a direct elevation of man's inner nature itself.

The consideration of such teaching and also of the laws that govern the actual building of the city beautiful may therefore be postponed until we have first considered how we may quicken the spiritual desire to have a city beautiful at all. This brings us to our third problem: if we could by some means secure a city beautiful, how far would that outer example react upon men's inner nature? How far will the beautiful city develop the true citizen sense?

Now just as we may love another human individual with a nature different from our own, so may we love an expression of another nature in an

environment that is not ours. Few of us can have visited Japan without falling in love with her, although Japan does not in any sense express *our* nature. We may then wish to reproduce such an expression in our own environment. This humanity has ever done; and the great Renaissance is very largely explained in that way. The result, as we have seen in the case of a habit imposed, is that the inner nature is changed—as was the case in Italy. From admiring and copying Greece, she became more or less Greek in her own nature, the unfortunate thing being, that she largely misunderstood Greece, partly because the bulk of her knowledge was second-hand through Rome. Further, the mere admiration and understanding of the great example will react upon us; even if we do not attempt to copy. Plato rightly considered the appreciation and understanding of the beautiful as one of the greatest of all influences in making beautiful man's own inner being.

There have always been teachers to point to the great examples; and the desire to imitate those whom we consider great and to emulate great achievements is universal. But again there must generally be some appreciation and understanding, before the spirit of emulation begins to work. Nevertheless even where little or no appreciation is felt, there is a force at work. When we see nothing that is not beautiful we become accustomed to following the lines and proportions of beauty, and even this in some way constitutes a habit. When we then wish to make something for ourselves, we follow the familiar lines, and this, as we have seen, will help to mold our nature in the direction of beauty. The average appreciation of art and beauty is undoubtedly slightly higher amongst children brought up in beautiful surroundings, particularly where there is some element of understanding. By the same law, ugly things produce an ugly nature, and the hideous toys called "gollywogs," etc., and the comic illustrations of our newspapers explain many of the tendencies toward depravity in our children. Personally, in my house I have found that the best plan is to forbid them, and to give orders that any that may enter shall be destroyed, so as not to corrupt other people's children.

However, in spite of the undoubted influence of environment and examples, both fortunately and unfortunately it is not so great as supposed. Even the worst surroundings will not entirely corrupt, nor will the best automatically result in salvation. In an age that by a swing of the pendulum over-emphasizes environment, it is most important to realize this, lest in our attempts at reform we be disillusioned. For example, in some of the schemes of housing reform in the North of England it was thought to be an excellent plan to introduce fixed baths into the smallest class of houses, trusting that the improved environment would foster cleanliness. But alas, the baths have been used for the storage of coal!

Or again we may ask—what has become of the great sculpture of Greece? did it make the inhabitants of the Greek lands lovers of the beautiful? It is one of the saddest facts of history that nearly all the great Greek sculpture has been burned for lime in order to make mortar!

Or yet once more—did the glories of the Middle

Ages make the succeeding generations lovers of the beautiful? Consider the case of my own city of Edinburgh. Did Trinity Church, the most charming church in Edinburgh, make the citizens lovers of the beautiful? It was pulled down in order to make sidings for a freight-station!

Beneath the great castle-rock was once the beautiful Nor' Loch. The then Lord Provost said that Providence had clearly designed the site of the Nor' Loch for a railway station. So the Nor' Loch was drained and the Waverley Station, at one time the largest in the world, was put in its place! And I have been wondering ever since, *what Providence has designed for the Lord Provost?*—but trust that he is in a position to appreciate the waters of the Nor' Loch now.

We may sum up our conclusions, so far, as follows: first, the beauty of the city depends upon the unconscious expression of the beautiful nature of the true citizen to a far greater extent than most men are at all aware; secondly, conscious expression, whether as a result of teaching or from a sense of duty, must in a democratic state initially proceed from a desire in man's inner nature; thirdly, although beautiful examples will have some direct effect upon men, even in this case the result is only appreciable when the inner nature is noble enough to be inspired and to desire understanding. Consequently we are driven to the Platonic point of view that the root of the matter lies in the noble nature itself. We may therefore have to fall back on a system of eugenics, as he suggests, and with or without such a system, perhaps, as he also proposes, adopt a graded scheme of society, but one founded on justice, so as to secure the dominance of the noblest natures.

There is, however, a third alternative, and again, after working it out, we find as usual that Sokrates and Plato have anticipated us. They argued that if only we had absolute knowledge we must do right—that wrongdoing arises from a mistaken notion as to what is really good. In normally constituted persons this is true enough: man does not deliberately choose the worse for the worse's sake. Even the murderer has a mistaken notion of good to be derived from his action. Otherwise he would not

do it. In other words, what he knows—and by *knows* we mean fully realizes—is the immediate gain; what he does not realize is all the infinite results to himself and humanity. This, it is true, is counter to the medieval point of view and accepts the Greek estimate of the fundamental nature of normal humanity. It may, however, be admitted, without leaving the Greek standpoint, that man does fail in effort, in energy, and may frequently be content to remain at the lower level or choose the lower, because of the effort involved. But this does not mean that he chooses the worse for its own sake.

What then we have to do as teachers is not simply to exhort, not simply to reiterate the value of beauty, which may become a most irritating procedure, but give men the knowledge that will force them to see that they are deliberately following their own worse interests. What we must do is to proceed from the known to the unknown; we must translate the unknown into terms of the known, the higher into terms of the lower and in that way compel men to see its value.

Let us take as an illustration a crude case from the material world. Here is an appliance worth a hundred dollars, which is known and understood. Here is a thing worth two hundred dollars, which is unknown and not understood and which appears to a man to be useless and of no value at all. Tell him that he can have them at the same price or effort and which will he choose? Of course he will choose the one of lower value. But prove to him that the other is worth just twice as much and then tell him that he can have it for the same price or effort; and which will he choose? Of course he will choose the one of higher value.

This man is what the true teacher must be and what we must attempt in the next section to show; we must not merely tell a man to follow beauty; we must make him understand, realize, fully grasp that the material things that he does understand are not worth so much as the beauty that he does not understand. If only we can do that, I for one have faith that he will follow. There will be faint hearts no doubt; but even they, although they lack the fervent energy to pursue the highest, will hesitate in the future to pursue the lowest. If only we can do it! certainly it is difficult; but we can try.

Ian B. Stoughton Holborn

(To be continued)

IN ITALY

I

A sunlit garden all a-dream within tall poplar trees;
Long arabesques of lazy paths; massed flowers;
droning bees;
Hills terraced close with clustering vines; bronzed
workers, merry throngs;
Old crumbling ruins ivied deep; the lilt of half
heard songs.

II

War's trumpet peal. A people armed affront the
northern sky.
Dark rumbling lorries swarm the roads. Grim
regiments plod by.
The mountain peaks, the climbing trench, the clash
of bitter strife—
Beneath, the mould of bygone pomp; above, the
thrill of life.

Tudor Jenks